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ABSTRACT

From the legislative point of view special education in Norway today is geared up to do a commendable job for all of the individuals who have a need for special services. The definition of special education has been broadened to include all kinds of special help, training, institutionalization and intervention programs. Along with this has come a comprehensive system for financing and administering the program. The major dark cloud remaining seems to be the lack of trained personnel to carry out the intentions of the legislation. The example of the school psychologist is a good example. It will continue to challenge the ingenuity of psychologists and educators to develop innovations to make the regional psychological/educational centers is any indication, the challenge will be met in productive and imaginative ways. (Author)

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IT HAPPENS IN NORWAY TOO:

LEGISLATION, SPECIAL EDUCATION,

THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST*

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In order for the reader to have some background for approaching the current state of affairs in school psychology and special education it might be worth while to briefly look back over the development of each of the two professional specialities.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

The earliest law covering the education of children with "developmental impairments," either physical or psychological, was passed by the Norwegian Parliament June 8, 1881. The law was titled: "Education of Abnormal Children." However, it should be noted that the legislation was written and implemented separately from the then existing educational system. Even before the first law covering the special child, the first state school for the deaf had been established in Trondheim in 1825, the first school for the blind opened its doors in 1861, and the first school for the mentally retarded was set up in 1874.

The law of 1881 said in effect that:

1. As much as possible, the general education program ought to have as its goal the preparation of good community members with a Christian ethic and at the same time prepare them to be self-sufficient.

2. In addition to this the special school ought to take over the task of seeing that all children in the special schools who were members of the state church received instruction and were confirmed in the church. (Blom, 1968)

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This original and rather limited law remained in effect with only few changes until 1915 when a major revision was undertaken. The revised legislation included a provision for state support and supervision of institutional care for all those children considered non-educable in the regular schools. The provision for funding was a great stride forward but again the system for special education existed outside of the domain of the regular educational system.

Between 1915 and 1951 little in the way of major changes took place. This is not surprising considering the economic and later political situation in Norway. By 1951, however, it was clear that the period of rapid general growth following the second world war had been paralleled by a growth in educational needs. The education system, which had been essentially dormant, suddenly underwent an explosive period of growth. Along with this came an increased public as well as professional awareness of the inadequacies and inconsistencies in the educational provisions for the exceptional child. During the period between 1915 and 1951 there had been a proliferation in the numbers of departments and agencies developing specialized programs or care units for groups of exceptional children and adults. In the urban areas there were rather good opportunities available for individuals with certain handicaps but in the rural, northern and more isolated districts the facilities were at best poor and often nonexistent.

A final problem to add to the confused situation was the fact that most of the legislation, and organization of special education remained separate from the regular education system. Separate in all ways, administrative, financial and legislatively. The act of Parliament of 1951 tried to remedy

the worst and most apparent weaknesses. For the first time children with speech, reading and writing problems along with epileptic and hydrocephalic younsters were included in special education programs. These were youngsters who might be found within the regular school millieu but not really able to cope with the demands of an age appropriate program aimed at their general age group.

Since the new regulations clearly included children who could best be helped through some sort of extension of the regular school system the next move was to consider which of the existing regular programs might best be modified and/or reorganized to suit the special needs of children with disabilities of one sort or another. One of the earliest efforts was seen in the very excellent improvement of pre-vocational and vocational programs opened up to the special child and young adult. There were, however, no provisions for pre-school programs at that time. Children received no state-supported educational assistance before the age of 7. Unless they were institutionalized they were on their own.

Yet another real advance as a result of the 1951 act was the inclusion of a provision for a uniform budget control and funding system in which the Ministry of Education took the responsibility for reducing many of the most glaring inequities between the north/south and urban/rural opportunities that were available. The improvement in the financial situation continued during the period 1951-1968. More of the responsibility for allocation and budgeting was set at the regional and local level with state subsidies to those districts unable to sustain an adequate program. In the case of large cities such as Oslo and Bergen they became administrative units in themselves. All of these trends had the effect of evening out the quality of special education throughout Norway.

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

Historically the development of formal school psychological services in Norway has been a rather recent phenomenon. The original school psychologists office was established in Oslo-Aker, the largest city/county in Norway, in 1946-7. The post-war boom in education had made itself felt in psychologists' circles as well as within special education. After the establishment of the first office the growth was extremely rapid. The rapid rate of growth was given another boost when the period of obligatory public education was extended in 1956. Thus the fifties saw two major changes influencing the growth of school psychology, first, the special education bill of 1951 and then the school law of 1956. One can see in Table 1 that the growth pattern was positively accelerating.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

In 1955 the working relationship between the school psychologist and special education was formalized to some degree. Two of the major points covered by the new legislation were:

1. The pedagogical-counseling services have the responsibility to aid the schools with any work requiring special expertise. They shall stand ready to provide diagnosis of school readiness, general ability, behavior adjustment, and academic problems of a rather more serious nature. As much as possible, the office itself or in cooperation with the school and family ought to try to help the student over their school problems. The counseling service shall facilitate and provide information regarding referral of individual students to special schools and to institutions which provide appropriate treatment. The counseling service can, furthermore, advise when it seems that special classes or special education placement is indicated. Informational services ought to be an important part of the office's priorities.

2. The counseling service includes, as a rule, children in the school age group. However, where it seems desirable and possible the counseling service can cover age groups both younger and older than the school age group. (Blom, 1968)

It ought to be pointed out that in earlier days the school psychologist was part of the so-called educational counseling services and only in the past few years have the centers been renamed to pedagogical/psychological centers.

By the end of the 1960s the role descriptions cited above had been substantially expanded. A survey of school psychologists between 1968 and 1970 indicated that they saw their roles as including such diverse functions as:

1. Community education and general informational work.
2. Investigative and diagnostic work culminating in formal reports.
3. Advising parents, teachers and students in general topics.
4. Follow-up treatment and supervision of referral cases.
5. Advisory services for school administrative personnel in areas of planning and decision making.

In any case the actual implementation of all of the role possibilities depended upon and continues to depend upon the availability of properly trained personnel in each of the centers. The number of referrals to the school psychological services has increased astronomically in recent years. The increased demand on the services far outreaches the number of trained personnel. However, as could be expected, the problem of inadequate staffing and unfilled vacancies continues to be much more a problem for the rural and northernmost communities while Oslo, Bergan and the southern coast does much better in recruiting professional staff members.

The improvements in special education and extensions of facilities for children with learning disabilities added to the woes of the school psychological services. The number of approved and budgeted positions for school psychologists more than tripled between 1958 and 1968. But, unfortunately the number of trained psychologists did not keep up with the demand and so the percentage of unfilled positions continues to be unrealistically high.

The Ministry of Education along with other interested professional groups established the "ideal" psychologist/pupil ratio at 1/3,000 and by 1968 this goal had been reached, at least on paper. However, the actual ratio differed widely nationwide, ranging from 1/650 up to 1/14,500! If the recommended ratio was to be accomplished in 1968 in every district, the country would have needed to have 200 trained school psychologists while in fact the number available was approximately 110. Since 1968 the overall ratio has dropped slightly to around 1/2,700 but the enormous range of actual ratios continues to be a problem. In addition, the largest case loads appear in rural and northern districts where there are comparable shortages in all of the helping professions and where communication problems compound the staff shortages. In poor weather the already meagre resources become nearly inaccessible to portions of each of the rural northern districts. It was estimated in 1973 that, including the needs for regular school psychologists' positions, special education needs and institutional assignments, only about 50% of the actual needs were being met.

CURRENT STATUS

This then was the state of special education and school psychology in 1968. Both suffering from financial woes and severe understaffing problems.

Furthermore, the assignment of responsibility for administration and supervision was still unclear in some areas and there continued to be an inequitable distribution of services across the country.

The compulsory education bill of 1968. This legislation can be described as a recent turning point for school psychology in Norway. It was with this act of Parliament that compulsory education for all children was extended to nine years. The resulting legislation went far in clarifying the role of school psychology in the educational millieu and expanded the area of responsibility for the pedagogical/psychological centers. However, in its first form it did little to improve the situation in terms of special education. Beyond suggesting that special education ought to be made available for those who needed it and expanding the definition of special education it did not specify how these aims were to be accomplished. Some few months before the new general school law took effect the Ministry of Education, under strong pressure from all sides, named a seven person committee charged with producing a document covering special education. It seemed at the time that the intention was to prepare parallel legislation in the area of special education to complement that about to become law in general education. The committee that was named represented a real cross section including educators, a psychologist, a parent and a judge. The chairperson, Knut Blom is an educator, and his name was destined to become the popular title of the committee--the Blom committee.

The committee's mandate was:

> ...To develop new regulations covering the responsibility for establishing, managing, and supervising of special education programs, and as far as possible, to integrate the regulations into the general school laws. (Blom, 1963)

The results of two years diligent effort was the first really comprehensive law covering special education in the widest sense of the term. The law was passed as a set of amendments to the general school law and was an integral part of that legislation, antoerh first. The act of Parliament, signed by the King, May 3, 1974, covered three major areas of emphasis: (1) decentralization, (2) integration, and (3) assignment of responsibility.

Of the three themes, it was integration which proved to have the broadest implications and to arouse the most controversey among professionals. By integration the committee made it clear that they did not just intend to write some laws that might be physically bound in the same volume as the general school laws. Nor did they intend to stop at common financing and administrative structure. It was their intention at the very least, to integrate budgeting, planning, staffing and facilities where possible. It was their hope that at best the integration would extend to systematically integrating the children themselves into the regular school millieu whereever feasible. Thus there should be one common school law which covered the needs of <u>all</u> children, with special provisions within the law for those children with special needs. The committee went so far as to drop the Norwegianized form of the English "integrering" and substitute the pure form "blande sammen" meaning literally to mix together.

Under the guidelines proposed by the Blom committee children who had previously not had access to educational opportunities for reasons of handicaps of one sort or another were now not only eligible, but in fact, were to be sought out for special programs. The committee took their lead from

the section of the 1968 law which stated: "All students have a right to obtain an education in accordance with their capabilities and personal goals." This phrase became a key to the committee's notion of integration, equal access to a quality education, but clearly with performance standards geared to the capabilities of the student.

With an eye to allaying the fears of some teachers about the possible negative side effects of classroom integration of exceptional children, the committee attempted to clearly define how they envisioned physical integration. They pointed out that those children whose needs clearly demanded teacher skills and facilities beyond the scope of an ordinary classroom or even school building would not be forced into a situation ill suited to their needs. They also expressed an awareness of the cruelty of imposing integration upon exceptional children who might be ill equipped emotionally to handle the ordinary classroom. It was not the intention of the committee to ignore these needs, but, it was their intention to insure <u>whatever</u> the needs of any child, those needs would be met at a level equal to that available to any non-handicapped child.

When the committee considered the age range to be included in their proposals they took the stand that services ought to be provided whenever it seemed that the individual could benefit from the program, regardless of the age of the individual. Their first goal was to include a substantial commitment to early intervention for the special child. However, they also recognized that at the other end of the age continuum the educational efforts might need to continue well past the usual termination age for the conventional program.

Thus when the Blom committee had finished their work they had not only produced a set of proposed legislation covering special education but had gone much beyond that. They had articulated some long needed changes in the philosophy of education with regard to the child with special needs. Their proposal would alter the general school laws to include all children, even those not considered within the range of the standard classroom situation. Furthermore, they had started the wheels turning on a project that had as its goal offering every infant born in Norway the opportunity to obtain an educational experience suited to their capacities.

IMPLEMENTATION

Two groups found themselves on the firing line when the Blom committee report was made public. The first group, the teachers, were to be called upon to totally revise programs, organization and planning as well as change some basic philosophies about the role of the classroom. However, it is the second group, the school psychologists, that are of concern in the present instance. It was clear that the already hard-pressed services could expect to be inundated with referrals and requests for help in placement, diagnosis and specialized planning under the new system. There was no hope for more psychologists, there were already a number of unfilled positions. The burden was to fall to the regional educational/psychological centers. The concept under which the first center was organized could be summed up as follows:

(a) To help handicapped children, youth and adults to, as much as possible, become a part of a "normal" millieu and remain in the near vicinity of their home at the same time.

(b) To coordinate, and to some extent integrate, following the district plan, all instances relating to instruction, training, and special educational handling of handicapped individuals.

(c) To initiate as early as possible identification and intervention with handicapped children.

(d) To take part in planning when it relates to the development of facilities or programs for the handicapped in the district being served.

(e) To establish a stimulating special educational millieu where professionals with different specialities can best do a thorough and accurate job of diagnosis and planning for the handicapped.

(f) To try out new methods of treatment of the handicapped.

These goals are clearly very general and were only meant to serve as guidelines when establishing the earliest centers. It was, however, evident that the planning groups meant the district centers to plan the key role in early identification, diagnosis and educational planning for children with special needs. After some efforts at evaluating the results obtained by the earliest district centers a revised set of guidelines was developed. They were more specific and served as the basis for interdisciplinary cooperation. The emphasis continued to be on early identification and a coordinated effort at educational planning including all aspects of the helping professions. The most encouraging sign of all is the fact that the guidelines are steadily under scrutiny and are regularly being revised to reflect the results of reevaluations of the status of the district center. The program has not become a static "cure" for the problem. Rather the centers are a dynamic growing response to special needs in each district.

CONCLUSIONS

From the legislative point of view special education in Norway today is geared up to do a commendable job for all of the individuals who have a need for special services. The definition of special education has been broadened to include all kinds of special help, training, institutionalization and intervention programs. Along with this has come a comprehensive system for financing and administering the program. The major dark cloud remaining seems to be the lack of trained personnel to carry out the intentions of the legislation. The example of the school psychologist is a good example. It will continue to challenge the ingenuity of psychologists and educators to develop innovations to make the absolutely best use of limited staff and facilities. If the development of the regional psychological/educational centers is any indication, the challenge will be met in productive and imaginative ways.

TABLE 1

School Psychology 1958-1968

Year	Offices		Positions	% filled
1958	26	....	36	92
1960	38	....	58	95
1962	50	....	77	91
1964	67	....	98	78
1966	72	....	118	75
1968	81	....	144	76

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